



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael F. Nozzolio

Columbus Day: Honoring Our Italian American Heritage

Michael F. Nozzolio

October 13, 2014



On this day we honor the vision, commitment and courage of Christopher Columbus...but in so doing, we indeed honor the courageous actions of those who brought their Italian culture...along with their families... to seek the American dream

and all that is the best of our Nation.

We gain inspiration by the personal story of Christopher Columbus. We all know of his significant struggles, and great achievement.

Columbus Day honors Christopher Columbus the explorer. But the day means much more. Hundreds of celebrations across America this weekend recognize our Italian heritage. This is a time to reflect on the challenges, achievements and significant contributions of Italians to our American culture; and take collective pride and patriotism in the genuine and lasting spirit of our Nation whose liberties and freedoms shine as a beacon for the entire world.

From the very beginning of our Nation, the freedoms we hold dear as Americans were greatly assisted by our Italian American forefathers. We as Italian-Americans should take pride in the fact that Our Declaration of Independence bears the signatures of two Italian Americans...William Paca from Maryland, and Ceaser Rodney from Delaware; our independence was established and our Nation was formed with the help of three Italian regiments with over 1,500 soldiers, that crossed the Atlantic Ocean to fight side-by-side with the American patriots against British rule in the Revolutionary War, which at the time was a significant addition to the Continental Army.

List any and every field of endeavor—any achievement in our Nation...and Italian-Americans are part of it. For generation after generation, the success of our Nation has drawn heavily from the industry and resourcefulness of Italian immigrants and their families.

More importantly, the same can be said for the values brought by Italians that helped to make us a great Nation. The millions who came here brought with them a distinct strength of character, tremendous self-reliance, a determined sense of personal responsibility and respect, faith in God, devotion to family, and love of life.

It is in the spirit of Columbus Day, and my own pride as an Italian American, that I share a personal story of my family with you.

As one who loves learning about history...if I could choose to go back in any time to witness personally...I would choose to travel back around a hundred years ago to Sparanise, Italy, a small town in the province of Caserta, around 60 miles north of Naples, in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius. This is the town where my own father, Alberto, was born, to Giuseppe and Adele.

And I would give anything to be seated at the dinner table in their small apartment when my grandfather and grandmother engaged in their discussions with my father and Aunt Madeline, to leave the land of their birth; the land where all their families still lived; and discuss what sacrifices they would have to make to rip away from their home and their homeland to build a new life in America.

Under the immigration rules of the day, my grandfather could come to America and work, but needed a steady job and enough financial where-with-all before his family could also immigrate. Can you imagine: leaving home; traveling by boat over a 3,000 mile ocean to find work; not seeing your wife, your son and daughter for over seven years while you worked long hours in a factory, lived in a small, rented room and saved every penny you could to make sure your family would be allowed to join you as soon as possible. All this sacrifice to build a better life for your family...a better life for your family in America.

This tremendous story of sacrifice, determination, and courage is the story of my family...and the beautiful story is the history of all our families. It is the story replicated millions of times over. It is a story that echoes all across this room and all across America...I am sure you all heard your grandfathers and grandmothers tell this story of your family time and again. But they could not tell it enough. It is the story of us....it is the story we celebrate here today on this Columbus Day...and it is the story that made our Nation strong and true and free.

The real courage honored today is forged by the spirit of Christopher Columbus that encouraged all those who left their homeland to build a better life for their families by immigrating to America. They did not have a sense of entitlement and were not looking for a hand-out. They were looking for work in whatever form to pursue the American dream.

I take great pride in my heritage, my American citizenship, and the opportunity to represent you in the New York State Senate. The same pride my Italian grandparents and father felt when they became naturalized American citizens. The same pride your own families must have in your personal and professional accomplishments and contributions to your community.

Our Nation is so much stronger because of the spirit we honor today. A spirit we should never forget. Happy Columbus Day.